

me that Florida would pass such hideous laws. I think it's very important that the Justice Department weigh in and that the people in Florida are not disenfranchised.

THE NATIONAL DEBT AND FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. LANCE) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LANCE. Mr. Speaker, as our Nation's debt now approaches its current \$14.29 trillion limit, many Americans rightfully ask: How did this happen?

In the past decade alone, Congress has authorized an increase in the debt 10 times. When Republicans had controlled the White House and Congress, it was Republicans who voted for it. When Democrats have controlled the White House and Congress, it has been Democrats who have voted for it.

The Federal Government has only managed to balance its budget five times in the last 50 years, most recently with President Clinton, a Democrat, and Republican control in the House of Representatives. Washington now borrows approximately 40 percent of every dollar it spends. Foreign investors hold half of our Nation's \$14 trillion debt—not only from China, but from Great Britain, Saudi Arabia, and other places as well. Admiral Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has called the national debt “the single biggest threat to our national security.”

For the first time in modern history, last year's Congress passed no budget, no fundamental blueprint for spending, and no final decision on spending levels through the appropriations process for the entire fiscal year. We've been operating under a series of continuing resolutions, which has led to uncertainty as to Federal levels of spending and as to tax rates, which in turn has led to a lack of hiring in the private sector, with an unemployment rate of 9.2 percent, which in turn has led to less revenues in Federal coffers—a vicious cycle that cannot continue.

Any agreement to President Obama's request to increase our borrowing limit should include a real plan to bring our fiscal house in order and reduce the Nation's unsustainably high levels of Federal spending, debt and deficits. This should include substantial reductions in current spending—at least \$100 billion in fiscal year 2012—limiting Federal expenditures to a certain percentage of gross domestic product.

The historic norm has been 20 percent over the last generation. Tragically, we're now at 24 percent—and safeguards that will restrict future spending, such as a balanced budget amendment, which is contained in 49 of our 50 States.

Also, we must put partisanship aside and include reforms to save Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. If we do nothing, for example, regarding Medicare—and the President's budget

in the winter did nothing—the program will begin to go bankrupt in 2024, 13 years from now. That is simply unsustainable and unacceptable.

When I was a boy and a young man, the fundamental issue confronting the Nation was the threat of the Soviet Union and international communism, the focus of evil in the modern world, as President Reagan said.

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The fundamental issue confronting the Nation in the 21st century is fiscal responsibility. Will our children live in a diminished America? Will the promise of America that each generation will do better than the generation before it continue to exist? Will we continue to lead the world or will leadership pass to China or India or to some other place?

This is the great issue confronting the people of the United States, and it is the great issue confronting us here in Congress as well. Let's get our fiscal house in order.

THE REAGAN MYTH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. QUIGLEY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. QUIGLEY. Mr. Speaker, an American President once wrote a letter to the Senate majority leader, urging him to raise the debt ceiling.

The President wrote: “The full consequences of a default or even the serious prospect of default by the United States are impossible to predict and awesome to contemplate.

“Denigration of the full faith and credit of the United States would have substantial effects on the domestic financial markets and on the value of the dollar in exchange markets.”

That President's name was Ronald Reagan, and the year was 1983.

He closes his letter to Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker, saying: “The risks, the costs, the disruptions, and the incalculable damage lead me to but one conclusion: The Senate must pass this legislation before the Congress adjourns.”

Watching the House floor 28 years later, you could be forgiven for being surprised Reagan would ever say such a thing. That's because the Reagan who gets referenced on the floor here is a myth while the Reagan who wrote to Howard Baker urging pragmatism was a man.

The real Ronald Reagan once said: “All of us have grown up accepting, with little question, certain images as accurate portraits of public figures—some living, some dead. Seldom, if ever, do we ask if the images are true to the original.”

In the year of his 100th birthday, the Great Communicator might be amazed at how far his own image has shifted from the original.

He'd see his most dedicated followers using his name as justification for saying “no” to honoring our debts. He'd

see his legacy used to play chicken with the world's greatest economic engine; but as Reagan often quoted John Adams, “facts are stubborn things.”

The facts are these: President Reagan raised the debt ceiling 18 times. He recognized the danger of economic brinkmanship. President Reagan took responsibility when the deep tax cuts of 1981 didn't produce the promised revenue. He worked with both sides of the aisle to find a more sustainable balance. He worked with Tip O'Neill to shore up Social Security. He worked with my predecessor Dan Rostenkowski to reform the Tax Code and eliminate tax loopholes.

All of these actions would be condemned as tax increases by the purists who follow the image instead of the man. Image worship is a bipartisan disease, but we all do ourselves and our Nation a disservice by distorting past images to justify present policies.

As another American President, John F. Kennedy, once put it: “The greatest enemy of the truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive and unrealistic.”

To say I disagreed with President Reagan on a number of issues is an understatement, but the more I get to know the myth, the more I like the man. President Reagan was not a picture on the wall. He was President of the United States for two terms in office, and he did his best to fulfill his sworn obligations.

We in Congress would do well to follow his lead and focus on what we can do during our short time in office. Let's truly follow President Reagan's example and govern for the future, not a past that never existed. Instead of talking to portraits, let's talk to each other.

AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. JONES) for 5 minutes.

Mr. JONES. Mr. Speaker, I am once again on the floor of the House with a picture of children who have lost a loved one in Afghanistan. Eden and Stephanie Balduf, shown here at Arlington Cemetery, lost their father, Sergeant Kevin Balduf, on May 12 of this year.

Sergeant Balduf, who was stationed at Camp Lejeune Marine Base, and Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Palmer, stationed at Cherry Point Marine Base, were sent with the mission to train Afghan citizens to become police. The men had just sat down to dinner when a rogue trainee opened fire, killing both men.

In an e-mail to his wife the day before he died, Sergeant Balduf said: “I don't trust them. I don't trust them for anything, not for anything at all.”

This brings me to a quote from AC Snow's recent column in the Raleigh News and Observer, titled, “Time to